DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 093 IR 006 769

AUTHOR Mojkowski, Charles
TITLE Providing Technical Assistance to State Dissemination Projects: Linking at the National Level.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 30 Mar 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Toronto, Canada, March 30, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Information Dissemination; Interagency Coordination; Program Development; *Program Evaluation; State Departments of Education; *State Programs; Technical Assistance
IDENTIFIERS Educational Information; *State Education Agencies

ABSTRACT

NIE's State Capacity Building Program in Dissemination supports the development of comprehensive programs in State Education Agencies. The nature of the dissemination capacity is reflected in goals of providing greater access to information resources for educators, and realization of increased coordination among activities of SEAs. Each SEA addresses these goals through activities in the areas of resources, linkage, and leadership. In 1976, the National Testing Service began the development of an evaluation design for the State Capacity Building Program. A technical assistance component to assist projects in applying information from the program evaluation, and to provide technical consultant services to help address project-identified needs was also established. Technical assistance services provided are grouped into the categories of communication, leadership development activities, evaluation documentation, conceptual development, and ad hoc consultant assistance. Assessment of these technical assistance services indicates a de-emphasis of ad hoc services, more responsibility by project directors for their own leadership development, more attention to transformation activities aimed at bringing conceptual and theoretical material to the attention of project directors, and distinction between their needs and wants. (Author/MBR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED167093

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Providing Technical Assistance to State Dissemination Projects: Linking at the National Level

Charles Mojkowski

NTS Research Corp.

Presented at the Annual Meeting of

The American Educational Research Association

March 30, 1978

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Charles Mojkowski

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

IR006769

Providing Technical Assistance to State Dissemination Projects: Linking at the National Level[1]

Charles Mojkowski

NTS Research Corp.

The National Institute of Education's State Capacity Building Program in Dissemination supports the development of comprehensive dissemination programs in State Education Agencies (SEAs). The nature of this dissemination capacity is reflected in the two broad goals of the Program:

1) Providing greater access by all educators to an increased quality and quantity of information resources.
2) Realizing an increased coordination and orchestration among the many dissemination activities under way in SEAs and in states.

Each SEA addresses these goals through activities in three broad areas: resources, linkage, and leadership. The Program has some relatively unique features:

1) A non-prescriptive posture is taken by NIE. States are free to define "comprehensive dissemination capacity" within a broad framework.
2) NIE staff view the development of the Program and the individual projects as a "collaborative" effort.
3) Each SEA is given a commitment for funding over a three to five year period based on success in meeting project objectives on a yearly basis.

The Program began in July of 1975, and as of this date, twenty-nine states are participating.

In October, 1976, National Testing Service (NTS) of Durham, North Carolina, began the development of an evaluation design for the State Capacity Building Program. The design was focused on the Program and not on the individual projects. Two major questions which guided the design were:

1) How is dissemination capacity being developed in State Education Agencies as a result of the NIE Program?
2) Is the SEAs' dissemination capacity having an effect? If so, what is the nature of the effect?

Design activities were planned for completion in August of 1977 with initiation of data collection scheduled to begin in September, 1977. The design period was extended to December, 1977, and has now been continued through March, 1978. These delays in the development of an approved design have put off the completion of data collection instruments.

A relatively unique feature of the NTS Evaluation was the establishment of a technical assistance component within the same procurement. The technical assistance component has the following major purposes:

1) to assist the projects in applying the information resulting from the Program evaluation to their projects, and
2) to provide consultant assistance services for addressing project-identified needs (both individual and cross-project)

While the evaluation component has been located at National Testing Service offices in Durham, North Carolina, the technical assistance component has

been based in Rhode Island. This separation of locations has not hampered the development of each component but special efforts need to be undertaken in order to maintain communications.

The technical assistance component is "staffed" by a half-time Deputy for Technical Assistance (DTA). A small amount of money is available for supporting fees and travel expenses for consultants. In addition, monies for communication activities are also provided.

The evaluation and the technical assistance activities were implemented as discrete and separable entities, although the DTA did participate in the development of the evaluation design during Phase I. This early involvement in the design activities was intended to insure that the evaluation reflected the reality exisitng in the states. During year 1 of Phase II, intended as the implementation period for the evaluation, the DTA has maintained an increased independence so as not to influence the evaluation itself nor to be perceived by some project personnel as part of the evaluation team.

Because of the delays in implementing the evaluation, the first major purpose of the technical assistance component has not been addressed to date. To guide the delivery of technical assistance services, a plan was developed, based on the needs of the projects as perceived by the Deputy for Technical Assistance and by the project directors themselves.

Technical Assistance Services

The characteristics of the Capacity Building Program are such that technical assistance services are a natural consequence and requirement. Because NIE provides no detailed guidelines and very few restrictions,

states are free to define dissemination capacity in a manner which is consistent with the environment in which the project exists. This environment is comprised of such elements as the organizational characteristics of the SEA, its goals and priorities, and its relationships with local school districts. Thus, the states are seeking descriptions of options and alternatives for addressing common goals. A great deal of adaptation takes place and the technical assistance function serves to facilitate such adaptation and sharing. Adaptation is necessary because the specific features or activities addressed to each project goal vary from state to state. Thus, for example, variations of linking functions across the states are as much a function of the context in which the linker operates as they are a function of the generic role.

Given that the Program is designed as a collaborative effort between NIE and the states, the technical assistance function serves as a principal mechanism for realizing such collaboration. Specific services provided may be grouped in five major categories:

Communication. Communication activities are multiple method and designed to facilitate two and multiple-way sharing among project directors and between the directors and the DTA. Two broad types of communication are conducted: regular telephone and/or written communications with each project director and a computer conferencing system. The major method of maintaining regular and uniform communication is the distribution of a monthly memo called Technical Assistance Update. This memo provides information regarding relevant nationwide dissemination activities and about sources of information and assistance for project directors and staff.

In order to facilitate sharing among project directors, a computer conferencing system was established in December, 1977. The purpose of the system is to allow project directors to provide information and assistance to one another, as well as to serve as a mechanism for holding "conferences" without the disadvantages of costly time and travel commitments. The conferencing system operates in both a real time, synchronous mode and in an on-going mode in which participants enter the conference on a regular basis (usually once a week). At present, approximately half of the twenty-nine projects are participating in the system. Evaluation of its utility and effectiveness will be undertaken following a six-month trial period. While not participating directly in the conferencing system, the DTA monitors the "minutes" of the conference and follows up with information and assistance where appropriate.

Leadership Development Activities. The purpose of activities in this area is to provide project directors with opportunities to address major issues relating to the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated dissemination programs, the second major goal of the Program. To guide the design of such activities, the DTA developed a prospectus which identified needed skills and knowledges relating to directing Capacity Building Projects in SEAs. In addition, the paper proposed some broad strategies for addressing such needs.

As a first step in addressing needs in this area, a Conference on SEA Leadership in Dissemination was conducted by the DTA in December of 1977. The Conference introduced project directors and managers to some of the

priority topics needing attention and provided directors with an opportunity to clarify the issues and specific development needs in these areas. At present, it is anticipated that the technical assistance component will conduct follow-up workshops for project directors to provide in-depth treatment of these critical areas. The focus of these sessions will be on problem definition and problem solving using outside resource experts together with the collective talents of the project directors. A planned outcome of such workshops is documentation describing the issues related to the area under consideration (e.g., dealing with intra-organizational relationships in orchestrating dissemination services) and proposing alternative "solutions" for addressing the issues. Such documentation will serve as a working document for supporting on-going solution building in each area.

Evaluation Documentation. Three major activities were proposed to assist project directors in improving their documentation and evaluation activities. A compendium of instruments and forms used by the projects was compiled by the DTA and made available for each project director. In addition, updates to the compendium are provided regularly to all project directors. A second activity is the preparation of a model system for documentation of project activities. This service is being developed because of the inadequate documentation processes maintained by many projects. Finally, in conjunction with the evaluation component, it was proposed that evaluation services in such areas as instrumentation, methodology design,and in data analysis and reporting would be provided

to projects. It was intended that states would customize the NTS instrumentation for application to their own unique information needs. Since the implementation of the evaluation has been delayed by additional work on the design and instrumentation, it has not been possible to provide such assistance to states at this time.

Conceptual Development. Most project directors are too busy to wade through the conceptual and theoretical literature regarding knowledge production and utilization or regarding organizational change and change management. Their day-to-day activities do not naturally accommodate these perspectives; pragmatic concerns predominate. There is, however, considerable utility in the growing amount of literature dealing with KPU concepts. There is even a growing body of documentation regarding experiences with dissemination strategies and tactics. Given the nature of State Education Agencies, the incentives for application of theory and concepts to day-to-day practices are weak.

Because the Capacity Building Program has as one of its purposes the coordination and orchestration of dissemination activities within SEAs and within states, project directors need a strong background in conceptual issues relating to organizational change, knowledge utilization, linking, and interorganizational relationships. In order to stimulate project directors to address such issues, a series of brief stimulus papers, usually not more than three to four pages in length, accompany the monthly memo which is sent to all project directors and managers. Topics covered thus far are:

1) Developing linker support systems

2) Developing an SEA dissemination plan

3) Developing a needs sensing system for dissemination services

Ad Hoc Consultant Assistance. A small amount of dollars are available to support the travel of the DTA or the fees and travel expenses of consultants in order to respond to ad hoc assistance needs of the project directors. Given the limited resources available, direct services to individual projects have been meager. Consultants have been used to participate in conferences and to support other cross-project activities in order to gain a higher cost-benefit to projects than might be realized through individual assistance.

A bi-product of technical assistance activities has been the development of a linking/liaison role for the DTA in relating to other major nationwide dissemination activities, particularly with respect to those programs which have resources which could be used by the projects.

The explosion of dissemination activities has made increased demands for the DTA to keep abreast of activities in all programs which could conceivably impact on the Capacity Building Program and projects. Considerable time has been spent in linking to such activities as the National Dissemination Leadership Project, the National Diffusion Network, the Research and Development Exchange, Vocational and Special Education dissemination activities, and to emerging efforts to develop linking systems. Such liaison activities help to minimize the problems which fragmentation causes - precisely the problems to which Capacity Building Projects are addressed within their own states.

The Linking Role

Butler and Paisley (1978) have identified three aspects of the linking role which are relevant to the technical assistance services being provided under the NTS contract. These roles are: resource provider, process helper, and solution giver. The role which the DTA takes in providing assistance varies from state to state. This variation is caused in part by the "entitlement" given the DTA. This concept is used by Paisley to characterize several factors influencing the linking role. Thus, in some states, emphasis is on providing information while in other states the emphasis is on dealing with the development of process skills and activities related to building dissemination capacity. While the former role is a common one, it is used to increase legitimacy and gain entry to the project. The real goal is to serve as a process helper since this notion is consistent with the capacity building theme of the Program.

The role of solution giver is rarely played both because of the nature of the Program and of the limited entitlement given to the Deputy. Thus during the first year a significant amount of time has been spent in general communication activities, in reviewing project materials, and in looking for appropriate resources. No doubt, this entitlement is influenced by the varying expectations that project directors have of the DTA. Also, despite the fact that the DTA is a former Capacity Building Project director and was and is actively involved in SEA dissemination leadership activities at the national level, the role of assister is not uniformly accepted by each project director.

Given the varying entitlements possessed by the DTA, an increased emphasis has been placed on refering project directors to other sources of assistance and to brokering such services within the limitations of the resources available. It has always been the case that the DTA could not provide the needed expertise for all of the project needs. The emphasis on refering and brokering merely operates on this fact. The teleconferencing system recently initiated has the potential for providing a project-controlled communications device for sharing and refering, as well as providing another needs sensing mechanism for the DTA.

Assessing Technical Assistance Services

What have we learned as a result of our experiences during the past year of providing technical assistance services to the projects? We believe a lot. Much of our learning has been translated as quickly as possible into shaping our services. Some of the major learnings gleaned from experiences to date are:

1) There is a need to deemphasize ad hoc services to individual projects. Regardless of the resources that could be made available, benefits from this mode of assistance are not consistent with the level of resources that would be required. In rare instances, where it is the case that the DTA can play a critical helping role, such individual assistance can be accommodated.

2) The DTA needs to be more proactive in providing technical assistance services. Such initiative can be demonstrated through proposing, recommending, and promoting a more active role on the part of project

directors. This is not to say that technical assistance should not be responsive to needs and requests generated by individual projects or groups of projects. Rather, it is based on the assumption that the level of benefits to be derived from the resources available is greater when such services are directed to needs perceived to exist across the majority of projects. Also, given the present level of resources available for technical assistance, it is difficult to provide the kind of individualized service which a solely responsive mode requires.

3) Project directors need to take more responsibility for their own leadership development and for procuring technical assistance services which they need. In addition, they need to perceive themselves as sources of technical assistance to each other. They need to work on issues and problems that they identify. They need to seek and procure appropriate human and material resources. In essence, they need to have greater control over the technical assistance services provided to them. Needs assessment activities conducted at a recent leadership development conference provided project director input for determining technical assistance services.

4) More attention needs to be given to transformation activities aimed at bringing conceptual and theoretical material to the attention of project directors. There is a need to delineate the implications of the growing quantity of literature for dissemination capacity building and suggest processes that might be undertaken to explore options related to new knowledge or theory regarding dissemination and change.

5) While the role of the DTA is similar in many respects to that of the typical (if there is one) linker, there are marked differences. For one, the "territory" is somewhat larger than that covered by most linkers. The communication problems inherent in working with a nationwide distribution of individuals and projects serve as serious impediments given the present level of resources available for technical assistance servcies. Moreover, the knowledge base directly related to the needs of individual project directors is quite small and weak. We are far from having identified validated practices in this area.

6) It is important for the DTA to distinguish between wants and needs as expressed by project directors. Serving wants is important for establishing a climate and relationship in which real and important needs can be identified and addressed. It is the latter objective which demands serious attention by the DTA and which requires more sophisticated sensing mechanisms than want lists produced by the directors themselves.

7) NIE staff, particularly project monitors, need to be more closely involved in the design of technical assistance and in participating in many of them. NIE project monitors can also help to "market" technical assistance services by advising state project directors of available services relating to their specific needs.

Assessment

The inadequacies of the better mousetrap theory apply to the technical assistance service. Some project directors have not actively availed themselves of any services despite the fact that nearly every state could

benefit from one or more of the services. Several reasons can be postulated for this phenomenon:

1) Perceived inadequate entitlement on the part of the DTA
2) Perception that the DTA could not understand and accommodate the unique needs of a particular project or project director
3) Perception that the technical assistance is tied to the evaluation effort
4) Perception that the technical assistance services are inadequate to the needs of the projects, being merely a "step child" of the evaluation, representing a token response to substantial needs
5) Reticence to share problems and needs with an external agent hired by the funding agent (NIE)

Another important aspect of the use of technical assistance services by the project directors is that relating to the incentives existing for such use. In the case of most projects, typical motivations either do not exist or are of insufficient magnitude. For example, many projects do not have internal evaluations which would provide the quantity and quality of information which would stimulate requests for technical assistance. In addition, the delay in the conduct of the NTS Evaluation has impeded the use of such information for determining technical assistance needs.

Although technical assistance activities have been severely under-resourced during the past year, enough positive outcomes were realized to merit increased commitment and support on the part of NIE. Given the important role which State Capacity Building Projects can play in the development of a nationwide dissemination system, it is critical that the

projects have the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Such potential can only be realized through the continued provision of technical assistance services to the projects.

Footnote:

[1]This paper is based on work conducted as part of Contract 400-77-0166 with the National Institute of Education, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express their professional judgement in the conduct of the project. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official positions or policies of the National Institute of Education.

Reference:

Butler, Matilda and William Paisley, Factors Determining Roles and Functions of Educational Linking Agents. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory, January, 1978.